

VZCZCXYZ0001  
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHIN #1263/01 3000913  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 270913Z OCT 09  
FM AIT TAIPEI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2544  
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 9451  
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 0865

UNCLAS AIT TAIPEI 001263

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/TC, EAP/P, EAP/PD - THOMAS HAMM  
DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)  
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. BEEF IMPORTS TO TAIWAN

Summary: On October 27, as the controversy revolving around the Taiwan government's decision to open its market to U.S. beef continued to stay in the spotlight of the Taiwan media, news coverage also focused on the prosecutors' investigation into allegations of game fixing during the 2009 regular season of Taiwan's professional baseball league. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" lambasted the Ma administration for its opaque and arbitrary decision-making process in allowing the import of U.S. ground beef and offal. An editorial in the KMT-leaning "China Times" also criticized Taiwan's central government for its unclear decision-making process when opening Taiwan's market to U.S. beef. An editorial in the pro-unification, economic-oriented "Economic Daily News," however, said Taiwan has gained a lot by using U.S. beef imports in exchange for talks on a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) with the United States. An editorial in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" also urged the public not to worry about the safety of U.S. beef. End summary.

A) "[The Ma Ying-jeou Administration] Cannot Even Settle a Cow, What [Ability] Does It Have to Talk about an Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement?"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 680,000] editorialized (10/27):

"... In fact, the storm caused by the invasion of [U.S.] ground beef and offal was not a single case. First, it concretely and precisely reflected the Ma administration's consistent black-box [decision-making] procedures and its blind spots since Ma assumed office. ... Second, in terms of negotiating strategies, when a small country engages with a big country in negotiations and maneuvers, the number of its bargaining chips is relative and not absolute; the government [of the small country] should take advantage of all its mechanisms and conditions as a strong buttress when it deals with other countries. ... When it comes to the [import of] U.S. beef this time, which 'forfeits [Taiwan's] sovereignty and humiliates our nation,' the Legislative Yuan had reached a resolution in 2006, which said it required congressional consent to open [Taiwan's market to U.S. beef]. The Ma administration is particularly unforgivable in the way that it has not only openly cast away this ready-made weapon, but has also arbitrarily kept the KMT legislators in the dark.

"Third, judging from the perspective of the art of negotiation, reaching an agreement is a process of give and take. If both sides find [the terms] unsatisfactory but grudgingly acceptable, they can reach a consensus, shake hands and sign the deal. The Ma administration, amid the calls of surprise by the Taiwan people, suddenly decided to open Taiwan's market fully to U.S. beef by giving up its weapons and fleeing in a rout; what kind of equivalent commitments or promises has it got from the United States in return after all? [All we see] as of now is nothing but a blank check. Some foreign affairs officers revealed that the U.S. side mentioned at the negotiating table that '[the U.S. beef imports] would affect

the progress of Taiwan-U.S. Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) talks.' Should such remarks prove to be true, it already constitutes some kind of intimidation and threat and is not a quid-pro-quo at all. ... The Taiwan-U.S. beef talks this time have resulted in making the prion protein, which endangers people's physical and mental health, a ticking bomb that may go off any time. What is the Ma administration planning to sell out next time when Taiwan and China hold the talks on the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement?..."

B) "U.S. Beef vs. Independent Management by the Common People"

The KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 120,000] editorialized (10/27):

"... One does not need [Taiwan] officials to put on a show to bet their lives by eating T-bone steak and drinking beef offal soup to guarantee to the public whether U.S. beef is safe to eat. What the government should do is [to find out] if we have actually gone to the United States to examine U.S. beef when the first batch of U.S. beef is about to be imported into Taiwan? In terms of the many more imported [beef] products in the future, the government should demand that the United States establish a food production traceability system, providing us with as much information as possible in terms of every step starting from cattle raising, slaughter, packing and labeling, so that the hesitant residents standing in front of the beef vendors can make their choice.

"But up until now, except for the empty remarks by the Department of Health regarding imposing strict examinations [of U.S. beef] and irregular inspections in the United States, we have yet to see any concrete moves [from the government]. The central government has lost its ability to function, but what is fortunate is that the

local governments and private sectors have taken the initiative to fill in [for the central government]. Taipei Mayor Hau Lung-bin fired the first shot by saying that he will work with restaurant owners and beef importers to declare that they will never use U.S. beef offal and ground beef. Also, [Hau] said he would see it as a top priority to check on and control the lunches for the primary students, a matter of high sensitivity to the parents all over the country. His call has won immediate echoes from the leaders of Taichung City and Kaohsiung City and County. In the face of the threats posed by the mad cow disease, the reaction and practices of the local governments are obviously closer to the public opinion when compared with the central government which stresses 'economy for the common people.' ..."

C) "How Much Should Taiwan Sacrifice for Trade and Economic Liberation"

The pro-unification "Economic Daily News" [circulation: 150,000] editorialized (10/27):

"The public has grown indignant in the face of the [government's decision to] open the [Taiwan market to] imports of U.S. bone-in beef, offal and ground beef; they even lambasted [the government's decision] by saying that the decision has forfeited Taiwan's sovereignty, humiliated our nation in total disregard of the lives of the Taiwan people. But after a few days of settling and sinking in, the inside story has gradually emerged: the decision was a sacrifice made in pain to request that the United States agree to sign a Trade and Investment Agreement [TIFA] with Taiwan. ...

"[When it comes to the beef deal,] it was just some U.S. ground beef and offal and there are very few cases of mad cow disease as of now, not to mention we can make the [beef imports] more transparent and restrain its spread by using the power of the market. In comparison, the beneficial effects [for Taiwan] of getting the TIFA from the United States and using it as a breakthrough for [Taiwan] to establish free trade and economic relations with other economic regions are far too great. It cannot be viewed as a sacrifice at all. ..."

D) "Don't Be Mad, Please"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (10/27):

"... For one thing, the protocol isn't an unequal treaty. It wasn't forced upon Taiwan by the American Institute in Taiwan. The representative of the MoD negotiated with her American counterpart on an equal footing. Of course, opponents may pick faults, accusing her of failing to protect Taiwan's public health against an onslaught of mad cow disease. But the fact is that there won't be any BSE invasion. Specified risk materials are placed under special control. ... We wish to call on our public health-conscious legislators not to worry. Their taking the administration to task is already more than enough warning to even 'beef-eaters' -- not the yeomen of the Tower of London -- not to risk a one-in-a-million chance of getting mad cow disease by going to chic steak houses to order a fat T-bone steak for dinner ...

"On the other hand, we are certain that the opposition is just opposing for opposition's sake. Democratic Progressive Party leaders, from its chairwoman Tsai Ing-wen on down, are more than happy to seize what they believe is a golden opportunity to embarrass President Ma Ying-jeou. Had the protocol been signed while President Chen Shui-bian was in office, no one in the current opposition would have raised any objections. Remember Chen recently described himself as an agent of the U.S. military government on Taiwan who had to take orders from the AIT in Taiwan? Please also remember what the United States has done to help Taiwan become what it is now. Without its help, there would be no Republic of China on Taiwan. There would never have been any economic takeoff that created many steak lovers here in the first place. The United States is the only country in the world that may come to our help if and when hostilities break out across the Taiwan Strait. Taiwan owes Uncle Sam so much that it should accept this benign protocol that opponents have wrongfully described as treaty that humiliates the country, willingly."

STANTON